

BELMONT MILL, ASSAY OFFICE  
(Nevada Belmont Mill)  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Approximately 7 miles south of U.S. Route 50 on USDA Forest  
Service Road No. 623  
Ely vicinity  
White Pine County  
Nevada

HAER NV-46-G  
*HAER NV-46-G*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

### BELMONT MILL, ASSAY OFFICE

HAER No. NV-46-G

Location: Approximately 7 miles south of U.S. Route 50 on USDA Forest Service Road No. 623, Ely vicinity, White Pine County, Nevada.  
U.S. Geological Survey, Seligman Canyon, Nevada, 7.5 Quadrangle (1992), Township 16 North, Range 57 East, Section 1.  
UTM Zone 11, Easting 2060754.40, Northing 14266725.21 (southeast corner of building) (NAD 83).  
Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Feature No. F2.

Significance: The Tonopah Belmont Development Company (TBDC) was one of the most important companies created during Nevada's early twentieth-century mining boom. As ore deposits in its central Nevada mines were depleted, the company sought new claims to resurrect its fortunes. In 1926 TBDC built the Belmont Mill near Hamilton to process lead and silver ore from its recently acquired claims in the White Pine mining district of eastern Nevada. The small pilot mill employed the most recent advances in table concentration and flotation mineral processing techniques, and the company erected numerous other buildings and structures to support the mining and milling work, including the all-important assay office. The site was largely abandoned by TBDC after a few years, but later owners used the mill and associated structures for smaller operations. Today, although most of the equipment has been removed, the Belmont Mill site is one of the only intact early twentieth-century mill complexes in eastern Nevada. The mill complex is a tangible reminder of the decline and failure of a once-powerful company and, thereby, of the boom and bust cycle so common in the mining industry. The subsequent modification and reuse of the site for small-scale operations typifies the ceaseless hum of optimism that sustains the mining industry.

Description: The two-room, gable-roofed assay office is located in the canyon bottom about 60' south of the mill (NV-46-A) at the base of the steep hill that rises immediately to the west. It measures 26'-6" north to south and 14'-4" east to west. The shingle-clad south part of the building is the original while the metal-clad north part is an early addition.

The assay office appears to have no foundation; floor joists were raised on square posts set directly on the ground. The wall framing in the south section comprises nominal 2" x 4" boards set flat on the east and west walls and true 2" x 4" boards with the narrow dimension out on the north and south walls. Horizontal sheathing of 9" shiplap boards is nailed over this, then a layer of pale grey building paper, and finally 16"-long wood shingles of variable widths. The shingles were painted grey originally; the original finish is visible in the north addition, where the south interior wall is formed by the former

north exterior wall of the original building. The exterior walls of the addition are finished with vertically oriented corrugated metal, a few sheets of which are hand-painted with "Tonopah Belmont Dev. Co, East Ely, Nevada" [like those of the mill and the power house (NV-46-B)]. A tall, wood-framed platform with a built-in ladder was constructed against the north exterior wall and attached to the wall with bolts and angle iron. The purpose of this is unclear, although it was presumably associated with equipment used in the assay office.

The wood-framed roofs are of matching pitch, although the roof height of the original building is lower. Accordingly, collar beams were used to create additional interior headroom rather than joists, which were used in the taller north addition. There is evidence of a fire at the north end of the south section, where new rafters were sistered against charred rafters. Both roofs have intermittent board sheathing, and the south roof is clad in wood shingles while the north is covered with corrugated metal sheets. The gable end eaves of the south section comprise rakeboards of nominal 1" x 4"s and soffits of nominal 1" x 5"s, originally painted white. The long east and west sides are finished with a board fascia only, nailed to the rafter tails. The north addition eaves are formed by the overhanging lip of the metal roof panels. Two openings for metal stovepipes or furnace flues are present on the south section, one at about the center of the west side of the roof and the other at the north end of the east side of the roof, adjacent to the north addition. The north addition has one opening, at the north end of the east side of the roof.

The wood-framed windows of the south section include two sliding sashes at either end of the west wall, mounted on simply framed tracks on the interior; a single-hung window in the south wall with plain board trim, a canted sill and an apron, painted white; one sliding sash on the north end of the east wall and one pair of interior-opening casements at the south end. All of the sashes are missing except the remnants of hinged stiles and rails on the south end of the east wall. The north addition has single-hung, six-over-six-light wood windows on both the north and east walls; the sashes remain in place and are finished with plain board trim. These windows are typical of those used for other TBDC buildings dating to 1926, including the mill, power house, and boardinghouse (NV-46-I). Louvered wood vents are located on the north and south gable peaks as well.

The south section of the assay office originally had two doorways, one on the south end and one on the north. The latter became an interior doorway when the north addition was built. The north addition has one doorway in the west wall, providing access to the graded path that leads to the mill. All doorways have simple board trim, originally painted white; all doors are missing.

The interior of the south room has a floor of 3-1/4" tongue-and-groove boards oriented north to south. Two wood-trimmed square openings have been cut in the floor, one near the center of the west wall and the other in the southwest corner; the purpose of these openings is unclear but they were presumably associated with equipment in the room. The walls and ceiling are finished with "Cornell" brand pressed wood board tacked to the studs with nails and painted light green. A molded wood baseboard is also present. A

standpipe, presumably for water, is positioned at the center of the east wall. Remnants of knob-and-tube wiring indicate that the building was electrically lighted at one time; unusually, the porcelain knobs are rectangular rather than cylindrical as is the norm in the other buildings on site.

The interior of the north addition has a floor of 3" tongue-and-groove boards oriented north to south. Walls are finished with wood board in the northeast corner only; it appears that all other walls and the ceiling remained unfinished originally. As noted above, the south interior wall is the former exterior wall of the south section, and comprises well-preserved, grey-painted wood shingles and white-painted eaves. Wood shelving is built against the west wall. The knobs of the remaining knob-and-tube wiring are cylindrical, like the other buildings erected by TBDC in 1926.

History: See the Narrative Overview in HAER No. NV-46 for a broad contextual history.

The assay office was erected on the site by TBDC in 1926. The south section is the older part of the building, but based on the non-standard materials used in construction, including a mixture of sliding, casement, and single-hung windows and rectangular porcelain knobs for electrical wiring, it is possible that this section of the building was constructed earlier and trucked to the site from a different location, perhaps the company's holdings in Tonopah. The relocation and reuse of buildings of this size and even much larger was an extremely common practice in Nevada at the time. There is only one mention of the construction of the assay office in the newspaper accounts in 1926, when it was reported that "the bunk house is practically finished as is the assay office and other necessary buildings."<sup>1</sup> By contrast, there are fairly detailed accounts of the mill, power house, and the boardinghouse construction, a further indication that the south wing might not have been newly built. The north section was added prior to ca. 1940 and may have been added in 1926 after the south section was moved to the site. The quality of construction and the use of construction materials common to other 1926 buildings on site, like corrugated metal siding with "Tonopah Belmont Dev. Co." hand-lettered on some sheets, six-over-six-light wood windows, and cylindrical knobs for electrical wiring indicate that the north wing dates to 1926 or shortly thereafter.

No equipment and very few furnishings remain in the assay office, but it seems evident that the south room served as both office and laboratory while the north room provided additional workspace and storage. Equipment most likely included sturdy workbenches, a small rock crusher, a muller for finer grinding, an assay furnace, sieves, scales, and various chemicals and reagents.<sup>2</sup>

The assay office is visible in two photographs from ca. 1940 (see Figures 3 and 4 in HAER No. NV-46). The north addition is in place, as are the three tall stovepipes or

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<sup>1</sup> Ely Daily Times, May 19, 1926.

<sup>2</sup> A good description of the assay process and the equipment involved is provided by Beth and Bill Sagstetter, The Mining Camps Speak (Denver: Benchmark Publishing, 1998), 113-131.

flues. Two stairs lead to a small platform outside of the south door. Tax records through the 1980s continually refer to an assay office, indicating that the building was never used for another purpose.

Former Ely resident Rod Jensen recalls the period in the 1960s when Ermyl Dowd acted as the Belmont Mill caretaker. Jensen worked claims in the area between 1966 and 1969 with his father, and remembers that all six boardinghouse rooms were occupied by miners working area claims during the summer months, sometimes at double occupancy. No one roomed in the supervisor's office or the assay office, but Mrs. Dowd maintained flowerbeds in their front yards.<sup>3</sup>

A ca. 1980 photograph captures the north end of the assay office and reveals that it has fallen into disrepair, although the north stovepipe in the south section is present, as are the windows in the east wall (see Figure 8 in HAER No. NV-46). After 1980, when a site caretaker was no longer employed, the building was neither used nor maintained. Today the south section of the assay office is in poor condition: most of the roof shingles are missing as are all doors and windows, resulting in extensive damage to the interior floor, wall, and ceiling finishes. The southeast corner has settled and is structurally unsound. By contrast, with the exception of missing doors and windows, the north addition is in good condition due to its more durable materials of construction.

Sources: See HAER No. NV-46.

Historian: Anne Oliver, Principal, Oliver Conservation Group. Fieldwork for the project was conducted in the fall of 2010. Project documentation was accepted by HABS/HAER in 2011.

Project Information: See HAER No. NV-46 for complete details. In summary, this project was completed under a contract between the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and a consulting team under the direction of ajc architects (Salt Lake City, Utah), in consultation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. The project historian was Anne Oliver, historic preservation consultant with Oliver Conservation Group. Matt Wallace, intern architect with ajc architects, was responsible for the architectural measured drawings and completed all fieldwork and final drawings with the assistance of Oliver Smith Callis, draftsman. The photography was produced by Steve Tregeagle Photography under the direction of Steve Tregeagle and with the assistance of Heath Brown.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Hal (Rod) Jensen, Jr., 1 October 2010.